

Local glory – The 2002 South Lady Braves and the ISHAA Championship

The year was 2001 and the players of the South Vigo Lady Braves looked forward to the upcoming basketball season with great expectations. Life-long friends Darci Rector and Jackie Gustafson were particularly excited about the season ahead. While former star player Kristen Weddle was not there to join them, the team's prospects were very high with lanky senior Reicina Russell at center. Braves coach Alan Maroska knew the team would be talented, but nobody anticipated some of the scores the Lady Braves churned out: 97-40 against South Vermillion, 104-33 against North Vigo. These numbers were unheard of in High School girls basketball!

At the season's end, few were surprised the Braves had high momentum in the IHSAA tournament. One by one, the Lady Braves battled through several tough games, coming up against old foes like Martinsville and Ben Davis. Before each game, the players got pumped up by watching *Remember the Titans*, a film which took on a superstitious status as every viewing on the bus during the tournament brought the Lady Braves a victory.

With star guard Melanie Boeglin and athletic center Reicina Russell dominating the boards, the South Lady Braves entered the championship game at Conseco Fieldhouse with vigor. As Russell later recalled, "they started dumping passes inside," and Russell kept scoring. With a strong lead at the half-time mark, the Braves swept South Bend Riley 63-42. With much triumph, the proud and jubilant Lady Braves entered the locker room with tears of joy. The moment was filled with joy, but it was also bittersweet as it would be the last time *most* of these girls would play on the same team.